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HIGHER CROP YIELDS FROM IMPROVED VARIETIES

corn

soybeans

wheat

oats

legumes

grasses

Purdue University
Agricultural Extension Service

Mimeo AY-66a
Revised 1957 (3c)

BUCKWHEAT

by

Agronomy Department

Buckwheat is not as well adapted to Indiana conditions as to the states farther north and northeast where the climate is cooler. Hot weather during the blossoming period blasts the blossoms and prevents the formation of seed. For this reason, late seeding, so the blossoming period comes after hot weather is past, is advisable. The likelihood of hot weather even in September makes the crop rather uncertain. It may be seeded as late as August 1 and used as an emergency crop after it is too late for any other crop. (See AY-56a for latest date of planting corn and soybeans).

SOILS: Buckwheat will grow on practically any type of soil. To prevent lodging, it is best not to sow it on muck or land too highly fertilized with manure or nitrogenous fertilizers. Sandy loams and light colored silt loams are best. Jimson, which often volunteers in highly fertile soils, is very objectionable in buckwheat intended for either flour or feed. Buckwheat competes well with most annual weeds. However, farmers report serious competition from horseweeds on river bottom soils.

PREPARATION OF SEED BED: A seed bed as prepared for wheat is desirable. If ground is plowed, it should be done far enough in advance of seeding to allow settling and compacting by rains and disking. The crop is usually not fertilized, though it often responds to phosphate fertilization. The crop will grow on acid soils, gives little response to liming, and is a vigorous feeder on poor soils.

RATE AND DATE OF SEEDING: Buckwheat may be sown any time from late May until August. However, experiments at Purdue indicate that seedings around the latter part of July usually give the best results in this area. One bushel of seed per acre is the usual rate, though growers sow from two to five pecks. Seeding is usually done with the ordinary grain drill. The plant branches considerably with thinner seedings, so that the two peck rate often yields as well as heavier rates.

HARVESTING: Buckwheat begins to blossom when a few inches high and continues to blossom until stopped by frost. By the close of the growing season, plants will have blossoms, green seed and ripe seed all at the same time. The seed shatters easily, making it difficult to harvest with machinery without considerable loss. Harvesting with a mower or binder when damp helps to avoid excessive shattering losses, and it is usually best to harvest just before frost in order to minimize shattering. When cut with the binder the bundles are set up promptly in small shocks of three to four bundles. A windrower or mower with side delivery attachment is a good method, especially where the combine with pick up attachment is to be used for threshing the grain. Much of the green seed will mature while curing in the windrow.

THRESHING: Thresher or combine harvester should be adjusted about the same as for soybeans. The material is usually threshed directly from the field after rather thorough curing in the shock or windrow, although it may be put in the mow or stacked and covered with a tarpaulin. Direct combining after frost is sometimes practiced, but usually at great loss due to shattering when harvesting is delayed until the grain can be stored safely. (See addition 1 below).

VARIETIES AND YIELDS: The Common, Silver Hull and Japanese are good varieties. All three have been tried under Indiana conditions and each yields and mills about like the others. Yields usually range from 8 to 20 bushels per acre.

Weight per bushel is 50 pounds and a bushel will mill from 25 to 28 pounds of flour. Use of seed testing less than 47 pounds per bushel is not recommended.

Most of the buckwheat grain produced in the United States is used as feed for poultry and livestock. Less than 20 percent is used for milling purposes. Some is exported in years of oversupply and low markets.

Buckwheat grain contains about the same amount of fiber as oats and is not as palatable as most grains, especially for fattening shoats. It should be mixed with corn, oats, or barley; the buckwheat preferably not forming over one-third of the mixture. When buckwheat forms too large a part of the ration, it tends to produce too soft pork. It should be ground for all classes of stock except poultry. Fed in suitable mixture, it is a satisfactory substitute for grain in feeding dairy cows and other stock, probably being worth 10 to 15 percent less than oats.

ADDITION 1: Grain driers permit combining at a much higher moisture content, thus minimizing the loss due to shattering.